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FLOOR DEBATE

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SENATOR KREMER: Thank you, Mr. President, members of the body. Let me give you just a little bit of background. We introduced this bill last year. It was about two down on the agenda when we adjourned. We had interim studies the year before that, and we had...we looked at really all checkoffs: corn, soybean, wheat, beef, pork, whatever, just to get people's ideas on what needs to be done. It was overwhelmingly support of checkoffs. Checkoffs are money that is...comes from the producers themselves to promote our agriculture products, whatever they might be. Many...most of the other checkoffs, there's no refund at all. It's all mandatory. The wheat checkoff is mandatory. They want it left that way. They can even use it for lobbying. Many of them can't. The beef checkoff was instigated in about 1988, something like that, I could be off a year or so. It started out with a referendum and I think the referendum passed by about 79 percent. So it was a decision of beef producers. I remember at that time if you even had one head of livestock, of beef, like a 4-H calf, you could come and vote on that. So it was not big producers. It was not numbers of animals. It was the producer themselves, not like somebody that fed 10,000 head could have 10,000 votes. The beef council now is a private entity. We do not want it to be a public entity for-profit. It has to meet all the qualifications that make it qualify for that, and that was in place on the national level. They are elected by producers. In order to get to be nominated, you have to go around and get 100 signatures of producers to be nominated to be voted on. Then the board is voted on by the producers themselves. The money is all producer money. The livestock industry is about a \$6 billion industry in Nebraska. We provide about 20 percent of the beef for the nation. We need to promote our products. You can see what happens when Japan closes their borders to us. A lot of money, at least from the corn checkoff money, goes toward the beef export federation, which tries to develop markets throughout the world. We...the "Beef, It's What's for Dinner" is one of the most recognizable slogans that we have. The safety of beef; we'd done lots of research with this money on E. coli, and I noticed just the other day where E. coli incidents have dropped I think about 80 percent of what they were at one time. They've dropped down 80 percent, so there's just a lot fewer than what there was. Chris Calkins from the University of Nebraska has done a lot of research on